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Research Memorandum
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ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS:
APRIL 19 - MAY 2, 1962

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Negotiations. Secretary Rusk met with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin twice during the week prior to his (Rusk's) departure from Washington for the NATO Ministers' gathering in Athens, but on neither occasion (April 23 and 27) were any new substantive elements introduced into the Berlin discussions. It was, however, agreed that the current series of US-Soviet exchanges would continue in Washington rather than in Moscow.

Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's report to the Supreme Soviet April 24 contained the first detailed public discussion of the Berlin talks by a Soviet source for some time, and his presentation suggested the possible emergence of several variants to the Soviet position. Although adhering in general to familiar Soviet proposals, Gromyko proved to be equivocal both on the matter of Allied troop presence in Berlin and on the "free city" concept.

Gromyko referred to replacement of occupation troops by neutral or UN forces as part of a "normalisation of the situation in West Berlin" but presented this latter point as one of a "complex of questions" for which an "agreed solution must be found ... simultaneously with the conclusion of a peace treaty with the GDR by the Soviet Union and other states willing to do so." Elsewhere he termed troop replacement merely "one of the variations of the solution of the problem of guarantees" and in still another formulation, linked it entirely to Ulbricht's proposal for an arbitration agency on access as the quid pro quo for such an arrangement. (In explaining the arbitration agency proposal to the Supreme Soviet, Gromyko treated it exclusively as a GDR proposal and refrained from any exposition of Soviet thinking on the subject.)

Gromyko's comments on a "free city" of West Berlin made no mention of a "demilitarised neutral free city," the standard Soviet formulation in the past. He mentioned instead a "free city of peace and quiet," and was specific only in insisting that West Berlin was not a part of the Federal Republic.

1. An authoritative Pravda "Observer" article published May 3 (technically outside the time span covered by this paper) reiterates the Soviet position on the Berlin talks and to some degree sharpens Soviet objections to the US proposals on access. The article terms the US International Access Authority unrealistic and insists only an arbitration-type agency (the Ulbricht proposal) is possible and that only if an agreement is reached on the withdrawal of Allied troops from West Berlin. The access to Berlin, according to "Observer," is possible but only by agreement with the GDR as "sovereign master of all lines of communications and air routes."

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Khrushchev also touched on the Berlin talks in his interview with US publisher Gardner Cowles April 20, noting that "some glimmers of hope for agreement" had emerged. He insisted, however, "it cannot be held that agreement is possible" without resolving the question of the "presence of Western occupation forces in West Berlin to which we cannot agree." But, in another passage, he claimed there were "no longer occupation troops but forces of NATO nations having absolutely definite designs against the socialist countries. These designs, naturally, alarm us and we cannot put up with them." (A Moscow lecturer April 30 echoed this formulation, stating the major problem in the negotiations now was the "question of liquidation of NATO forces in West Berlin.")

On April 20 the Soviet Ambassadors in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Rumania called officially on the heads of government at their respective posts to discuss the "US-Soviet exchanges of views on the peaceful settlement of the German question and problems connected with it." On April 24, TASS announced the second Rusk-Dobrynin meeting had taken place the previous day, noting that the two participants "continued the discussion of the questions pertaining to a German peace settlement."

Military Preparations and Demonstrations. No changes in military postures relating to Berlin and Germany were reported during the past two weeks.

One week after it became known General Clay was to leave Berlin the Soviet Union announced the recall of Marshal Konev from East Germany. According to the April 19 TASS announcement, Konev was returning to Moscow to take up duties in the Ministry for Defense. General Yakubovski was simultaneously reappointed commander-in-chief of the Soviet forces in Germany, the position he had held prior to Konev's arrival in Germany August 10, 1961. On April 28, Yakubovski's promotion to full general was announced; apparently at the same time. Col. Solovyev, the Soviet Berlin commandant, was promoted to the rank of general.

The American and Soviet political advisers to the Berlin commandants met at Spandau (in the British sector) April 19, 29, and 30 to discuss arrangements for a meeting between their respective superiors. (Both commandants are barred from entering each other's sector, the US ban on the Soviet commandant having been instituted at the end of December, the reciprocal Soviet ban on the American general in early March.) A further meeting of the advisers was scheduled for May 3 to decide upon the locale of the prospective commandants' session.

US military convoys on the Berlin-Helmsedt autobahn continued to experience sporadic delays at the Soviet checkpoint, generally in connection with Soviet demands on inspection procedure. No serious interruption of military traffic developed, however.

1. Khrushchev's and Gromyko's recent discussions of the Berlin-Germany issue are treated in detail in a separate Research Memorandum currently in preparation.

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Berlin and Germany. Across procedures to and within Berlin remained unchanged during the period. Several individuals (including the wife of the Venezuelan Ambassador to Bonn) were refused permission to transit East Germany en route to Berlin on grounds of improper documentation, but none of the cases appeared to involve a concerted attempt to harass traffic. Rather, the GDR for the moment appeared intent on demonstrating the ease of transit across its territory. During the Easter holidays in particular, with over 100,000 visitors travelling to Berlin, East German authorities exerted considerable effort to insure rapid processing of travellers.

Implementation of the GDR customs law April 30 has to date entailed no changes in existing practices; only the designations on the goods control offices at the border crossing points have now been changed to read "GDR Customs Administration," and new customs declaration forms have been introduced.

GDR Interior Minister Karl Maren on April 21 charged that West Berlin plans for a May Day demonstration in the vicinity of the Brandenburg Gate were "provocative" in character and warned the Senat would have to bear "full responsibility for all complications and consequences which may arise." The demonstrations in both East and West Berlin passed without incident, however, despite the fact that some 750,000 West Berliners appeared at the Western rally at the sector border.

Statistics released by the West Berlin authorities indicate that in 1961 150-170 West Berliners and West Germans were arrested by the GDR police while traveling between Berlin and the FRG on the autobahn or by train.

The Soviet Union has filed an application with the West Berlin Senat for permission to incorporate in West Berlin a branch of "Sovexportfilm," a Soviet film distribution agency, ostensibly to facilitate the sale of East bloc films. No Senat decision on the Soviet request has as yet been announced.

A number of known SED functionaries have officially moved their residences from East Germany to West Berlin in recent weeks, evidently in implementation of the reported plan to separate the West Berlin SED apparatus from that of the East German SED. West Berlin communist youth functionaries are also now receiving their training and instructions exclusively in West Berlin, not in the GDR as was the case before.

ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

Recent public Soviet pronouncements on Berlin, as well as Soviet gestures on the Berlin scene (departure of Kerner, promotion of Solovyov, overtures to rescind the commandants' ban, and the continued absence of harassment), while presumably intended to preserve the negotiating atmosphere, could also point to a more flexible Soviet bargaining position. Gromyko's speech to the Supreme Soviet conveyed a certain degree of optimism as to the course of the current talks, though he carefully refrained from clarifying the outcome which the Soviets are prepared to accept. *Chas*

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The key issue raised by the Soviets at the moment is that of the presence of Allied forces. On the face of it, the Soviets — notably Khrushchev in his talks with Gardner Coules — categorically demand the removal of Allied forces as the condition for any arrangement. However, the Soviets must be aware that the presence of Western forces is not negotiable. Hence, Khrushchev's formulation — i.e., that the USSR cannot "agree" to the presence of Western forces — leaves open the possibility of tacit acquiescence in such a presence especially if, in exchange for such acquiescence, the USSR can make gains on such matters as an increased GDR role in an access arrangement, non-diffusion of nuclear weapons to Germany and recognition of GDR frontiers. Moreover, both Khrushchev and Gromyko have steadily referred to the Western forces as "occupation" troops and/or as "NATO" troops.

The question raised by these formulations is whether the USSR would accept the continued presence of these forces under some formula that would remove their "occupation" or "NATO" character. One possible vehicle here could be the NATO-Warsaw Pact nonaggression agreement which Gromyko indicated was all but accepted in principle by both sides. Also suggestive is the frequent, though not consistent dropping by the Soviets of the words "demilitarized" and "neutral" from the "free city" phrase.

To carry this line of speculation further, it is noteworthy that in their various recent statements the Soviets have been most specific in their demand that the alleged "threat to peace" stemming from the Berlin situation and from the NATO presence there must be eliminated. The question here again is whether the Soviets might consider some formula such as a nonaggression agreement as sufficient to permit them to acquiesce in the continued presence of Western forces.

Finally, Gromyko's statement that signature of a peace treaty with the GDR should be "simultaneous" with agreement on a whole range of issues relating to Berlin as well as Germany (e.g., frontiers and nuclear weapons) seems to relegate consummation of the peace treaty to a rather distant date. If Gromyko's formulation does in fact reflect a Soviet decision to postpone a peace treaty, the question arises of what kind of arrangement the USSR envisages for Berlin in the interim. The possibilities here range from a formal interim arrangement to a de facto acceptance of the status quo — though not necessarily without unilateral Soviet and East German harassment of the West — while negotiations continue.

It must be observed that the line of speculation pursued here is based on the ambiguities and possible implications in what Moscow has or has not said. The most that can at present be said with any degree of assurance is that the USSR gives evidence of being interested in pursuing the possibility of an agreed solution but that thus far in the US-Soviet exchanges the chief elements in the Soviet position (e.g., Western troop withdrawal, change in West Berlin status, and respect for GDR sovereignty as minimum preconditions for free access) have remained unchanged.

How long the Soviets will be content to continue marking time in this way cannot be predicted on present evidence. At this point, they probably expect to be in a better position to assess the limits of the US position after the US has consulted with its NATO allies in Athens. Clearer signs of the direction of Soviet

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testies will probably not become evident until after the first Bush-DeBrynin exchanges following the Secretary's return from Athens.

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"Sovexportfilm", the agency which the Soviet authorities are attempting to introduce into West Berlin, has in the past been reported as a front organization of the KGB, the Soviet security service. Its activities have provided a cover for Soviet intelligence work in Southeast Asia in particular.

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S/S Mr. Baile
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Special Supplement to RM 3.32

RUSK DOBRYNIN TALKS (APRIL 23 AND APRIL 27)

The second and third meetings between Secretary Rusk and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin (April 23 and 27) added little of substance to the US-Soviet exchanges on Berlin. They did, however, confirm that Gromyko's speech to the Supreme Soviet April 24 and Khrushchev's interview with Gardner Cowles should be regarded as the currently valid Soviet statements of position on the subject. (These two presentations are being treated in detail in a Research Memorandum now in preparation.)

Dobrynin confined himself primarily to procedural matters in the April 23 meetings. He notified the Secretary officially that Moscow was prepared to continue the talks at whatever location the US President should decide. His only other item of business was to present Moscow's response to the Secretary's April 16 query on the relationship between the Soviet access proposal and the presence of Western forces in Berlin. The relationship, according to Dobrynin, had been defined by Gromyko at Geneva; furthermore, the USSR could not "accept an agreement providing for continuation of the occupation regime and the further stay of occupation forces in West Berlin." His instructions did not clarify whether the phrase "continuation of occupation regime" related to the status of West Berlin or to the troop presence; the Ambassador's personal impression was that it related to forces, not status.

On April 27, however, Dobrynin's instructions appeared to imply considerably more movement in the Soviet position than Dobrynin himself seemed aware. He reiterated his earlier contention that the Soviet position on Berlin had already been clarified, but in this instance cited the Gromyko Supreme Soviet speech and the Cowles interview as the specific clarifications. (Dobrynin also interjected, evidently on instruction, that the word "demand" in Gromyko's statement that the American side "does not see obstacles to combining free access to West Berlin with the demand to respect GDR sovereignty" should actually read "proposal".) He noted specifically that the Soviet position on an end to the occupation and to Western troop presence in Berlin was as stated by Gromyko to the Supreme Soviet.

Dobrynin's instructions on both occasions apparently did not envisage as yet a serious discussion of the details of a Berlin settlement, nor did they -- evidently deliberately -- attempt to clarify the access-troop relationship or the troop presence question. The specific reference to

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[the Gromyko speech allows for a variety of possible interpretations on these points (of the attached Assessment paper), and it would appear the Soviet side is interested in learning what conclusions the US chooses to draw from Gromyko's presentation before becoming more specific on its own part. It is also evident Moscow did not expect or at least did not reckon seriously with the possibility of any significant changes in the US position immediately prior to Athens. The USSR appears still to estimate that more flexibility will be forthcoming from the US side in the face of Soviet adherence to maximum, -- though not wholly clear -- positions.] b1a5

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